

MARK FOUNTAIN. ON THE FAST TRACK TO THE TOP.

July 2002

Mark "Spurt" Fountain is one of Australia's most promising young middle-distance athletes. He has also just returned from two months overseas training with Craig Mottram and Mike Power in the lead-up to the Manchester Commonwealth Games. I was fortunate to catch up with Mark for a couple of delicious "Pakington Bakery" muffins a bit of a chat about his experiences overseas as well as his hopes for the future.

N.M. Mark, you have just returned to Australia after two months overseas. How is it to be back home in beautiful Geelong?

M.F. It's great although it's a bit cold after the European summer. I got in some great training overseas but I am really happy to be back home.

N.M. This morning you had a run out at the You Yangs with Ritchie Jeremiah and Nick Ashton. I hope you remembered the way?

M.F. Yeah, I was OK. It was great out there as it's a lot tougher than London which is pretty flat so it was good to be running up a few hills and giving the legs a bit more of a work-out. It's also very pleasant running out in the bush.

N.M. How did the overseas trip come about?

M.F. It all happened pretty quickly. About a week before he was due to leave, Craig Mottram rang me and asked if I would like to go over with him as a training partner so I spoke to Scervo about it and we thought I would be doing pretty similar longer, base type training whether I stayed in Geelong or went overseas. In the end it was the best decision for both Craig and myself.

N.M. And you were overseas with Mike Power as well?

M.F. Yes - the three of us were in San Diego for about three weeks, then onto London for the rest of our stay.

N.M. Laguana Mountain in the Southern Californian desert. Why was this area chosen as a training camp because I hear it was pretty Spartan?

M.F. I have no idea why it was chosen. I think it was one of Nick (Bideau) and Sonia's (O'Sullivan) crazy ideas. As bad and as primitive as it was, it was also pretty good at toughening us up. The running trails were really tough, a little like running the 'West Walk' out at the You Yangs. There was not much to do so we ran a lot and rested a lot. However, we couldn't do a threshold session or a fast session there, so we had to drive 25 minutes down the mountain to about 4000 feet and a place called La Posta which was just a desert trail with rattlesnakes everywhere. Each day consisted of an early run, have lunch, maybe drive 30 kilometres for a coffee in town, go for a second run then do a circuit, cook dinner, then go to bed. It was almost like "Ground Hog Day" over and over.

N.M. So there was lots of rock-hopping while running?

M.F. Yes. I actually rolled my ankle on the second day but after icing that was not a big problem. Craig also had a big fall on our very last run at Laguana Mountain and he wasn't very happy for a while.

N.M. It sounds very much like a Kenyan training camp. Perhaps that was Nick's idea - to beat the Kenyans we need to train like them.

M.F. Actually, some of the Kenyans use it. The Kenyans who run with Team Fila have a camp up there that runs for six months each year. What they do is train up on the mountain for three months then race for three months followed by another three months at altitude. So they just rotate between altitude training and racing.

N.M. I also hear that your living conditions at Laguana Mountain were not particularly flash.

M.F. The living conditions were a little different to what we're used to here in Australia. We only had one TV station and we didn't find out about that until after a week of total boredom. For tea or coffee we had to boil water in a saucepan then scoop it into our cups because we didn't have a kettle. Our cabin where we slept was about 200 metres from where we cooked and watched the TV with one station, so it was pretty tough but I reckon it was a worthwhile experience.

N.M. How did the incident with the deer come about?

M.F. We had just been down the mountain to the Julien Coffee Shop and we were coming back up the mountain when a deer came bouncing out in front of the car. We either had to slam on the brakes and slide off the mountain or hit the deer at 100 kms / hour. So it was either the deer or us and unfortunately for the deer, it lost!

N.M. Who was driving?

M.F. Ummm. I drove down and it was Craig driving when we hit the deer.

N.M. How close to the rattlesnakes did you get?

M.F. On the last day we had to slam on the brakes while running because there was a rattlesnake right in the middle of the running trail but most other days we had to jump over a few snakes other than rattlesnakes. However, they were certainly about, especially in La Posta.

N.M. What is the altitude of Laguana Mountain?

M.F. 6000 feet.

N.M. So you would have been pretty fit aerobically when you came off the mountain?

M.F. Yes, we were pretty fit aerobically but track wise not so fast because we only did one track session while we were there.

N.M. After Laguana Mountain you were on to England where the conditions would have been a little different.

M.F. England was very nice. Quite often we ran around Bushey Park which is about 12 kilometres around so that was a huge change from the rugged terrain we had just experienced.

N.M. Many of the Kenyans are based near Bushey Park. Did you see many of them?

M.F. We saw them quite often. It's amazing, they start off at an absolute amble, probably about 6 - 7 minute kilometre pace but by the end of the run they're flying along at 3 minute kilometre pace or faster!

N.M. What sort of training were you doing overseas?

M.F. I was doing all the longer stuff with Craig. That was what I was planning to do this winter anyway. Over our summer I had glandular fever so this winter was going to be a time to put in some big base training to get strong again so it all worked out pretty well.

N.M. Have you taken your mileage up to a new high?

M.F. Yes. The week leading up to the B.M.C. 1500 metre race I did 175 kilometres which is as high as I've been so it was inevitable that I was not going to run super fast (Mark ran 3:47.1)

N.M. How did you cope with a 175 kilometre week?

M.F. For most of the time Craig and I were running about 160 kilometres / week and that amount of running was fine but I did notice that over that my body was feeling pretty tired and you don't feel like doing too much. Since I've been back in Australia I have been running about 165 kilometres a week and that feels fine - I'm used to it now.

N.M. This time last year what would you have been doing?

M.F. Probably about 135 - 140 kilometres in an average week. I think I'm pretty lucky that I'm light-framed so my body can adapt pretty quickly to a few more kilometres.

N.M. Life as a full-time athlete overseas. What have you learnt?

M.F. Actually, Scrivo made me write a list just before I headed back to Australia of things I had learnt. There are a few personal things that I won't read out but it's not very glamorous over there and it can be pretty tough, especially the mental aspect of the sport. I think a lot of people forget that you've got to train bloody hard over here because the standard is so tough. The European Circuit is where it's at. The best race in Europe and what you have done in Australia does not have an impact on what goes on in Europe.

N.M. It must be tough overseas, with all that time on your hands, if you're not running well?

M.F. It would be cruel if you're struggling. All day sitting around worrying about your form. There's not much to do - you can go for a walk around town but then you'd be tired for your next session. If you're not running well it would be the worst place in the world to be.

N.M. Do you think it's important to travel with a group?

M.F. Definitely. I don't think you could cope physically, but especially mentally, by yourself. You need to have people to bounce ideas off and people to relax with.

N.M. It must have been great to have Scrivo with you for the last month of your stay?

M.F. Yeah, it was great to have both Scrivo and Bart (Andrew Lambart) join us in London. It was almost like we were back home to have familiar people around.

N.M. Before Scrivo arrived, did you talk to him regularly via phone?

M.F. Scrivo rang about every second day but we knew what we had to do. We all had phone cards so we often rang friends and family back home to keep in touch with the civilized world.

N.M. Did you or Craig take University work with you overseas?

M.F. Yes, both Craig and I had work with us. Craig had an assignment and an exam to complete and I had an exam. I sat my exam in the London Exam Centre and I did pass so I was pretty happy with that.

N.M. Did you see any of the big stars and observe how they go about racing on the European Circuit?

M.F. We saw Noah Ngeny and a few of the other Kenyans training - they were based just down the road from us. They don't really do anything different to us so I can't understand why we can't race as well as them. Like us, they get up in the morning and run for 30 - 35 minutes then do their track sessions, which are virtually the same as what we do, maybe a fraction quicker but nothing too mind boggling. So you see them doing it and they've run this time so you think, maybe I can run that quick too.

N.M. Maybe it's their strong belief and almost arrogance that they should dominate and so they do?

M.F. Yes, I think you have to have some arrogance to be a top athlete. However, you need to be humble at the right times too.

N.M. Did you go to any of the Grand Prix Races while overseas?

M.F. I didn't go to any of the big ones. I went up to Manchester to watch the British Trials. They were pretty good but the weather was terrible. Whenever a big race was on a group of Aussies would go to a pub to watch it on TV and that was pretty exciting.

N.M. How did your move to Geelong come about?

M.F. About this time last year we sat down with Keith Connor (Athletics Australia Head Coach) and the V.I.S. and we talked about what was best for my running. I had really wanted to come to Geelong and they wanted me here so it was a win / win situation all-round.

N.M. And you have moved into Kim Henderson's Highton Institute of Sport with Tom Patton?

M.F. Yes, Kim's place is really nice and a great place to live. However, at first I moved in with Scervo's sister, Marge and her husband, John and they have been fantastic as well.

N.M. You're pretty lucky here at Kim's house with the river tracks just out your front door and just a 20 minute jog to Landy Field.

M.F. It's actually a 15 minute jog to Landy Field.

N.M. Well, it's 20 minutes for me - you obviously jog a little quicker than I do!

M.F. But yes, the river tracks are great and we've got a great in-ground pool where we can relax when it's warmer. And even in winter I've used the pool to ice my legs, so yes, it's a great place to live.

N.M. The training group in Geelong would also be beneficial with many top class middle and long distance athletes based in the area?

M.F. Yes, it's great. When I was living in Melbourne I was training by myself every session but Tuesday. But down here there's people like Craig Mottram, Troopy, Ritchie Jeremiah, Mark Boxer, Tyson Mahon, Ross Young and many others who are all aiming for the top and are willing to train together to help each other out.

N.M. And of course, Simon Field occasionally travels down for a session with the Geelong crew.

M.F. Yes, Fieldy does train with us. I would like to see him move down here but I'm not sure if he will. I reckon Fieldy is going to have a really good year. He has put in the hard work for a couple of years now and is ready to take the next step.

N.M. You have been a top junior athlete. When did you start and what are some of your early running experiences

M.F. I started in Little Athletics when I was seven and progressed through the ranks. When I was Under 10 through to Under 12 I was pretty fast and won a couple of State Titles over 400 metres. Then my old coach got me to run an 800 one day and I think I either won or got second in a State Championship over 800 metres then went up to 1500 metres. After that I had a few bad years when I was about 14 / 15. I was growing quickly and my running started to fall away a bit. Then at about 16 / 17 I started to run well again. Unfortunately, the last few years have been a bit down with injuries and illness but I'm sure I'll bounce back this year.

N.M. Who was your coach in your early years?

M.F. Tom Kelly. He was very good coaching junior athletes but in the end he was over-committed with younger athletes and did not have the time for my specific running needs. Also, it was time for a change plus I needed to be training in a group situation. So overall, the change to Scervo's group has been great for me.

N.M. You went to the World Youth Championships in 1999 and ran the 1500 metres.

M.F. That was a very good trip. It was in Poland and it was my first international trip with an Australian Team. I hope to make many more teams as a senior athlete.

N.M. How did you run in the 1500 metres?

M.F. I came 8th. The winner was Cornelius Chirchir who ran 3.30 for the 1500 metres earlier this year. I think he finished about 5 seconds ahead of me in Poland.

N.M. What do you think is your best distance?

M.F. Definitely the 1500 metres. I've always had good speed but since I've been with Scervo we've concentrated on endurance and strength and because of that I think I could run a pretty good 3 km. and 5 km. right now. But with a bit more speed work as summer approaches I reckon I could run well over shorter distances. However, it's always tricky getting the speed / strength / endurance balance right in your training.

N.M. You won the De Castella 3000 metres at last year's Zatopek Meeting. Did you enjoy racing over the extra distance?

M.F. Yes. It was good even though the time was very, very slow, which was a bit disappointing. There were people in the race that realistically could have run under 8 minutes - namely: Ritchie Jeremiah, Shawn Forrest and myself. But it was a bad night weather wise and a very tactical race so I was very happy just to win. At the moment I am probably best suited to running well over 3 km. with the training we have been doing but come summer, it will be back to concentrating on the 1500 metres.

N.M. Do you think you've still got your speed to go with the strength / endurance you have gained?

M.F. Yes. I have a little session that I do occasionally to see how my speed and strength is. Anyway, I did it last Thursday and it's still there.

N.M. Can you let our readers in on this special session?

M.F. No, it's a little secret session so I'm not going to give it away but it involves a 200 metre hill circuit near my house in Melbourne.

N.M. Speaking of speed, you are able to run a pretty quick rolling 200 metres. What sort of time are you able to crank out for 200 when you're in good shape?

M.F. I've run 22.5 - 22.6 a few times at the end of a session so if I could keep that sort of pace going for a little longer I would be very pleased.

N.M. With that sort of leg speed, you've got to like your chances if you're in contention with a lap to go?

M.F. If it's a slow race I'd always back myself but if the pace is on you've got to have the strength as well.

N.M. You love training on the track. In fact, if you could, you'd probably train there seven days a week. However, even though you don't like it so much, you have done very well at Cross-Country and are the current Australian Under 20 Cross-Country Champion. Is there a chance of you doing more cross-country racing in the future?

M.F. No! Scrivo might want me to do more cross-country but I can't stand it. I can't see the point of competing over 25 minutes. Many people might get annoyed with me saying this but I don't even think it's a sport - I think it's more of a wacky hobby like mountain running. It's not even in the Olympics and there's some pretty dodgy events that are in the Olympics like synchronised swimming.

N.M. Should it be in the Olympics?

M.F. Well, Paul Tergat would probably say 'yes' but there's already the 10 km. so, no, I don't think so. Cross-country is a winter thing to get you fit to run track in the summer.

N.M. Surely it must be a feather in your cap to be an Australian Champion at Cross-Country?

M.F. It probably looks good on paper but really it means very little to me. No one is going to take much notice if you're Australian Champion over 8 km. of cross-country.

N.M. It is a great indicator of your fitness level.

M.F. Yes, it is.

N.M. And many of the great middle-distance runners have used cross-country racing in their build-up to track racing.

M.F. Have they? I know Craig is a top cross-country runner and if I could follow along the path he is leading for the Australian athletes it would be good.

N.M. You are backed up by the V.I.S. What help does the V.I.S. provide?

M.F. Massage, air-fares to races, use of the facilities like the gym, regular sports testing like VO2 max tests plus they help me out with selected products and food like creamed rice, which I really like to eat.

N.M. And Eric Hollingsworth, the Head of Athletics at the V.I.S., has you doing a weights circuit regularly.

M.F. Yes, although I couldn't do much on the weights while I was overseas. But now that I'm back in Australia I will have to get back into doing my regular weight circuit.

N.M. Eric's big on having athletes strong all over.

M.F. Oh yeah. I think it's very important. I reckon if you think you're strong, then you're going to be strong. Athletics is very much a mental sport at the top level.

N.M. You had a couple of injury problems a few years ago. Do you think the weights have helped to keep you injury free of late?

M.F. Yes. I have been pretty well injury free over the last few years. The injuries seemed to start when I got a hernia doing weights under another coach who wasn't really watching me closely enough. However, Eric is really big on correct technique which is so important, especially if you're trying to lift heavy weights - if you don't do it properly you're wasting your time and something is going to break.

N.M. How many weight sessions do you do a week?

M.F. Three - Monday, Wednesday and Friday. We do cleans, squats, lunges, bicep curls, just a general all-over session.

N.M. Do you do any core-stability work with Swiss Balls?

M.F. No, Eric and I both dislike Swiss Balls. I think that if you can clean more than your body weight you're going to be pretty strong all over. Also, I think that doing exercises like bench presses works your abs anyway.

N.M. The up-coming track season - what sort of goals do you have?

M.F. I have got a few personal goals but basically to stay fit and healthy so that I can go out and run times I am very well capable of doing.

N.M. What sort of times over 800 / 1500 metres are you hoping for?

M.F. I'm never one to make public predictions. I'd rather just go out, do my best and let the times take care of themselves.

N.M. Finally, there is an Athletics Victoria 8km. Cross-Country Race in Ballarat on August 31. Are we likely to see you on the starting line in the Geelong colours?

M.F. Maybe - I'll have to talk to Scivo first.

N.M. Thank you very much for your time, Mark. All the very best for the up-coming season.

M.F. No worries - thank you, Neil.

RUNNER PROFILE

Mark Fountain

Occupation Athlete / Student

School Second Year University studying Sports Administration / Coaching. I am also doing a Personal Training Course.

Age 20 **Date of Birth** 10 / 3 / 82

Height 187 cm. **Weight** 66.5 kg.

Married / Single Single

Coach Bruce Scriven

Personal Bests

200m. 22.5

800m. 1:50.1

1500m. 3:44.9

3000m. 8.16

Favourite Food Chocolate M & M's and Ice-Cream

Food Eaten Before a Race Just normal food (no changes)

Favourite Drink Smoothies / Thickshakes

Favourite Movie "Dumb and Dumber"

Favourite Book "Where's Wally?"

Favourite Music / Band "Melloncollon", "Fenix TX" and "Unwritten Law"

Favourite TV Show "Jack Ass" a U.S. Internet show where contestants do wacky things like squirting mace in each other's eyes.

Favourite Night Spot on the beach with mates and a bonfire.

Favourite Holiday Spot someplace where I don't have to train.

A Recent Winter Training Week

Mon. am. 50 min. easy run.
pm. 35 min. easy run plus gym.

Tues. am. 35 min. easy run
pm. Track Session:
4 laps (4.34) 3 laps (3.15) 2 laps (2.04) 4 laps (4.37) all
with a jog lap between.

Wed. am. 70 min. easy run.
pm. 35 min. easy run plus gym.

Thur. am. Fartlek: 8 x 3 min. 'on' with 1 min. 'off'.
pm. 35 min. easy.

Fri. am. 50 min. easy run plus gym.
pm. 35 min. easy run.

Sat. am. Threshold run: 15 min. hard / 5 min. easy / 8 min. hard
pm. 35 min. easy run.

Sun. am. 90 min. Long / Easy Run.
pm. Rest.

Other Training / Recovery Sessions.

3 gym sessions per week. A massage once a week.

Favourite Training Session Sunday afternoon (rest!) or Seb Coe's session: 100metres, 110m. 120m. 130m. 140m. 150m. 160m. 170m. 180m. 190m. 200m. all with a jog back recovery. You run the first 100 metre rep @ 1500 metre race pace and gradually run quicker until the last 200 metre rep is run @ 400 metre race pace.

Favourite Race Melbourne Track Meet at Olympic Park where I ran 3.46 for 1500 metres as a 17 year old.

Best Ever Performance National U18 and U20 Champion over 1500 metres. 1st in De Castella 3000 metres at Zatopek Meeting. 8th in World Youth 1500 metres. 1st in U20 National Cross-Country Championships. Running 3.46 as a 17 year old.

Favourite Place To Train Anywhere with good company

Toughest Ever Training Session There's been plenty but maybe: 4 sets of 400, 300, 200 with 20 seconds recovery between reps and 1 minute recovery between sets. For this session I ran 400's (59 secs.) 300's (44 secs.) 200 (29 secs.)

Most Admired Runner / Person Jonny Knoxville - one of the 'nutters' from "Jack Ass".

Advice to Other Runners "decide on what you want to achieve out of the sport and work towards that goal."

Goals for the Future to not get sick or injured and to achieve what I know I am capable of."

Interesting Running Stories.

"While running with Troopy and Buster around the Eastern Gardens we had some girls take off their bras while they were following us in their car."

"While on another run I witnessed Troopy almost being thrown into the Barwon River by another well known Geelong athlete."

"Once, after heavy rain, I had to swim about 20 metres to get home as the track I was running along was under water. The Dandenong Creek rose more than two metres in the space of an hour."